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How the US helps al-Qaida

**US foreign policy brings terrorism to American shores, costs taxpayers billions of dollars
and destroys cherished liberties**

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Ever since 9/11, American society has had the self-destructive tendency of primarily seeing jihadist terrorists as monsters intent on devouring our social experiment in human liberty and popular rule. Rather than listen to what motivates the individual terrorists that have attacked the [United States](#) here and abroad, Americans only hear a convenient narrative left over from the Bush years: "[They hate our freedoms](#)." This belief, however, is nothing more than a collective delusion that continually feeds a foreign policy destructive of our homeland security. Nothing proves this more than examining the motivations of three men who have punctured Americans' sense of security over the past year.

In September, federal authorities arrested 25-year-old Najibullah Zazi who was planning to suicide bomb the New York subway system. The Afghan immigrant recently pled guilty of conspiring to murder innocent commuters. According to the New York Times, Zazi [rationalised his motive to kill innocents](#) this way: "I would sacrifice myself to bring attention to what the United States military was doing to civilians in Afghanistan by sacrificing my soul for the sake of saving other souls."

A little more than two months later, Americans were shocked when Major Nidal Malik Hasan, a Muslim army psychiatrist, murdered 13 people – 12 service members and one civilian – at the

military base at Fort Hood, Texas. Much like Zazi, Hasan's motivation to massacre his fellow comrades seems to have arisen from his horror at [US foreign policy](#), a policy he was entrusted to carry out. Two years before his crime, Hasan lectured colleagues that American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan [were an assault on Islam](#). "It's getting harder and harder for Muslims in the service to morally justify being in a military that seems constantly engaged against fellow Muslims," Hasan said in a self-fulfilling PowerPoint presentation. And while Hasan didn't blow himself up at Fort Hood, there seems little doubt that he never intended to walk away from his attack. And he didn't, an officer's bullet left him paralysed.

Finally on Christmas Day, 23-year-old Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, a rich kid from Nigeria, stashed powdered explosives in his underwear and attempted to blow up Northwest Flight 253 on its way to Detroit. Fortunately he failed. After his botched attack, National Public Radio investigated why the son of a prominent banker would [choose the path of a suicide bomber](#). One reason, it seems, was the treatment of Muslim detainees at Gitmo. NPR's West African correspondent Ofeibea Quist-Arcton said the anger motivating Abdulmutallab was unique in its violence but not in its sentiment. "I have to say that a lot of people I spoke to in northern Nigeria, if it wasn't specifically Guantánamo, were also talking about the fact of US foreign policy, the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Middle East, Palestinian-Israeli crisis, how they felt so personally that the US was attacking not only Muslims, as they felt, but even Nigerian Muslims."

It's time for the American people to realise that jihadist suicidal terrorism isn't primarily the product of religious fanaticism, but a logical response to US imperialism. "The central fact is that overwhelmingly suicide-terrorist attacks are not driven by religion as much as they are by a clear strategic objective: to compel modern democracies to withdraw military forces from the territory that the terrorists view as their homeland," Robert Papes, the pre-eminent US expert on suicidal terrorists, told The [American Conservative Magazine in 2005](#). Religion, according to the author of [Dying to Win: The Logic of Suicide Terrorism](#), only factors into suicide terrorism when the occupying power is of another confession. Say hello to the US-led invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq.

The tragedy of it all is that Osama bin Laden bet the United States would take his bait and lash out in revenge and hubris. By invading and occupying predominantly Muslim countries, undermining the rule of law through preventative detention and torture, and delivering death by drone, the United States proved Bin Laden's narrative of Christian crusaders and holy war. This accomplished two necessary goals for [al-Qaida](#): it manufactured more jihadists and it economically and militarily weakened history's greatest hegemon.

This positive-feedback cycle of imperialism and jihadism leaves Americans poorer, less secure, and more afraid. But rather than dig for the root, Americans continue to address the sprouts. Zazi's plot draws Congressional calls for [more mass transit security spending](#). Hasan's massacre leads the Pentagon to develop policies to [identify and address violent extremism \(pdf\)](#). Abdulmutallab's underwear bomb leads to rapid deployment of full body scanners critics call "virtual strip searches".

Almost nine years after 9/11, the United States has spent approximately a trillion dollars to fight this global "war on terrorism" as well as hundreds of billions of dollars of escalating

expenditures on homeland security. In return, American taxpayers continue to jeopardise their economic future for an imperium few benefit from and which brings the war to American shores while simultaneously eating up cherished liberties.

The United States, however, has an easy and moral way to rip out the root and make itself more secure and fiscally sound in the process. It should immediately begin to responsibly draw down its empire by withdrawing from Afghanistan and Iraq, shuttering its worldwide archipelago of military installations, and bringing home its service members. This will help dampen the allure of the jihadist narrative the likes of Abdulmutallab, Hasan, and Zazi latched onto. These men weren't born jihadists, they were made jihadists. The tragic irony is that the United States helped al-Qaida to do it.

And because of that, we spend evermore on security but continue to feel less and less safe.